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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TUNIS 001047

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR NEA/MAG (LAWRENCE)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/18/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [TS](#)

SUBJECT: ANONYMOUS COMMUNIQUE ALLEGE RCD DISCONTENT WITH BEN ALI

REF: A. TUNIS 777

[1B.](#) [WWW.TUNISNEWS.NET/28FEVRIER05.HTM](http://WWW.TUNISNEWS.NET/28FEVRIER05.HTM)

[1C.](#) [HTTP://PAGES.ZDNET.COM/PLM/ID276.HTML](http://PAGES.ZDNET.COM/PLM/ID276.HTML)

[1D.](#) PLEASE ALSO VISIT [WWW.STATE.SGOV.GOV/P/NEA/TUNIS](http://WWW.STATE.SGOV.GOV/P/NEA/TUNIS)

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Hudson for reasons: 1.4(b/d)

[11.](#) (C) Summary: Two communiques highly critical of President Ben Ali have been issued in recent months from a newly formed group calling itself the "Destouriens Democrates." Its anonymous authors claim to be members of the ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) party who are dissatisfied with President Ben Ali's rule, in particular the allegations of growing high-level corruption that are said to implicate the President's wife's family, the Trabelsis. The first communique focused on accusations of corruption and abuse of power by President Ben Ali. The second communique focused on the group's reform agenda. Although some have expressed the belief that the communiques are fabrications disseminated by opposition activists in -- or more probably outside of -- Tunisia, many of our contacts say they seem real and represent a growing trend of ruling party antipathy towards President Ben Ali and his in-laws. End Summary.

[12.](#) (C) Two communiques highly critical of President Ben Ali have been issued in recent months. The communiques claim to be from a newly formed group called the Destourien Democrates (an Arabic-French hybrid meaning "Democratic Constitutionalists"). Its anonymous authors claim to be members of the ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) party who are dissatisfied with President Ben Ali's rule, in particular the allegations of growing high-level corruption that are said to implicate the President's wife's family, the Trabelsis. The group's name is a play on the name of the RCD party, as well as the name of the party under former President Habib Bourguiba. For the full text of the two French-language communiques, see Refs B and C. A brief summary of each follows.

#### Summary Of Communiques

[13.](#) (C) The first communique appeared in the February 28 edition of the French-Arabic listserve Tunis News (Ref B) and also reportedly the March edition of the opposition magazine "L'Audace" (NB: L'Audace is published in France and officially unavailable in Tunisia, although some opposition activists acquire copies from abroad and circulate them informally). The Tunis News editors appended a note stating they received the communique on February 28 but also acknowledged that they had no way to verify its authenticity. The communique itself focused on two categories of accusations against the President: first that he and his wife's family were involved in a number of sweetheart deals involving valuable undeveloped tracts of land; and second, that the President had unnecessarily politicized the country's security services, particularly the Tunisian presidential security force.

[14.](#) (C) The second communique was first published on the website of Embassy contact Neila Charchour Hachicha (Ref C; Hachicha maintains close ties to RCD elites but is often critical of the regime) and claims to have been issued on April 6, the fifth anniversary of President Habib Bourguiba's death. Hachicha wrote that she received it via email from [lesdestouriens.democrates\(at\)laposte.net](mailto:lesdestouriens.democrates(at)laposte.net) on April 8. The communique described the group's goals, which it stated were to change the focus of the ruling party from its current emphasis on accumulating/maintaining political power, back to the party's former goal under Bourguiba of helping improve the lives of the Tunisian people. The communique was vague about the composition of its membership stating, "We are neither numerous nor few." However, the communique said a growing number of ruling party members share the group's critical views on the Party, the GOT, and President Ben Ali.

#### Views of Our Contacts

[15.](#) (C) Several of our civil society contacts across the political spectrum have raised these communiques in meetings with us. They say the documents look real to them and that this marks the first time that President Ben Ali has been

criticized so publicly by members of the ruling party, and could potentially be the biggest fissure within the RCD to be made public in recent memory. But even some members of the opposition have questioned the authenticity of the reports and/or the size of the group that is behind them. Most, however, concur that the sentiments expressed in the communiques represent real, growing dissatisfaction with where President Ben Ali has taken the country and the party. Contacts with closer ties to the ruling party, such as Hachicha or former Tunisian Ambassador to the U.S. Ounaies, generally have expressed more interest in the documents than members of the fringe opposition (Ref A). EU diplomatic contacts also have raised this issue with us -- although they also find it intriguing, none have had additional information about the group and/or authors worth noting.

Comment

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16. (C) We believe what is most significant about these communiques is the buzz that they have generated among Tunisian civil society elites that fall into the middle ground between ruling party true believers and diehard oppositionists. The communiques resonate with Tunisians who have for several years passed around rumors of presidential excesses. Regardless of the validity of the two documents, the accusations they make ring true to our contacts. It is probably true that RCD membership no longer brings the guaranteed, lifetime perks that it once did, which might be sufficient to motivate disgruntled party members to publish a few anonymous poison pen letters. What is notable about these specific communiques, however, is that they make such detailed allegations and seem to know the personalities of Ben Ali's inner circle of advisors, hinting that the authors have access to inside knowledge.

17. (C) Some Tunisians give the communiques credit because they are written in a more literate French than is usual for opposition activists and with a decisive style and active voice that is more typical of power elites than local intellectuals. It also would be a mistake to underestimate the significance of the group's decision to use the Arabic word "Destour" (instead of its French equivalent, Constitution) as a tactic to evoke idealized memories of the ruling party prior to Ben Ali's 1987 accession. Tunisia claims it was the first Arab or African country to adopt a constitution (1861) and the ruling party's name included the word "Destour" from before independence (1920) until Ben Ali renamed it in 1988. Although the Arabic name of the ruling party still contains the word Destour, most Tunisians think of the party by its French acronym RCD. This would accentuate the way that longtime RCD members are said to view Ben Ali: as an outsider, since the President (previously a relatively apolitical GOT official in the Ministry of Interior) only gained the party's support when he seized power.  
HUDSON